SITE VISIT REPORT

Historic or Common Name: Link House

Address: Fork River Road
         Waverly, TN
         Humphreys County

Date of visit: 20 April 2010

Owner: State of Tennessee

Photos: Shares/Identified Sites/Humphreys County/Link Farm

TENNESSEE
CIVIL WAR
NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

May 2010
Background: This visit was made at the request of Jack Gilpin, Tennessee State Parks. The State has recently purchased a tract of land with an old house and some outbuildings located on Fork River Road in Humphreys County. State Parks officials were interested in finding out the age and some history about the buildings. The property once was part of a larger nineteenth-century farm situated along the banks of the Duck River. The buildings that remain at the present time include the main house, a well house, a log smokehouse, a privy, a chicken coop, and the remains of a storage shed. The main house is in good condition, although vandalized, but all of the outbuildings are in ruins.

History: Banks Link, a farmer, had purchased this land in 1856. According to the 8th U.S. Census in 1860, the 38-year-old Link was married to Eliza, age 41, and they had 5 children, two of which had attended school in the past year. Link's father, Jesse, who was born in Halifax County, Virginia, also lived in the household. Although he could not read or write, Banks Link had achieved modest financial success, and owned real estate valued at $2,000 and personal property worth $2,000.

The Link family kept their land and property intact during the Civil War and continued farming. In December 1894, a farmhand working for Link discovered a cache of 46 elaborate stone implements that had been buried in a prehistoric Native American cemetery. The following March, two stone figures were unearthed by digging deeper at the same spot where the cache had been found. After both discoveries, the objects found were taken to the Link home on Fork River Road and examined by a number of interested parties.

By September 1, 1895, Banks Link had sold the collection to W.H. Meadow and R.W. Childs of Waverly. According to noted antiquarian Gates P. Thruston, this collection, known as the Duck River Cache, is probably the most remarkable group of chipped flint objects ever unearthed within the United States.
Report: The Link House is a traditional c.1850 frame Tennessee farmhouse that has been altered slightly and updated with modern materials. The one-story, five-bay, central hall-plan house measures 50 feet long and 18 feet wide, with an historic nine-foot-wide, full-length, shed-roofed rear porch and a rear kitchen wing. The building sits on a rock pier foundation and rests on 12 by 12-inch sills which bear the log sleepers that support the floor. The front section of the main roof is covered with modern enameled sheet metal panels, while the rest of the roof consists of the more traditional 5V galvanized sheet metal panels. The outside of the building’s braced-frame walls were covered with lapped horizontal yellow poplar boards, but modern vinyl siding has been installed over them. The original fireplaces on each gable end of the main house have been removed and smaller brick flues (one with an ornamental brick surround in the shape of the missing fireplace) have replaced them.

The front façade, which faces west, has a modern attached six-foot-wide front porch that runs almost the full length of the house. The porch roof is supported by six plain wooden columns. In the middle bay, the original entry door is missing but the historic paneled sidelights and overhead transom remain. Each of the four remaining bays features a single 4/4 double hung sash window. The north and south elevations of the main house do not have any windows at this time; however on the inside there are indications that at least one window was present historically and there may have been more.

As mentioned above, an historic rear porch runs the length of the house, one step lower than the main house. The porch ceiling consists of hand-planed, tongue-and-groove boards. The rear and side walls of the interior are covered with horizontal lapped yellow
poplar siding boards. A small room on each end of the porch has been framed in; the room on the north end measures approximately eight feet by nine feet and the one on the south is roughly fifteen feet by nine feet. A 4/4 double-hung sash window is centered on the end wall of each room and a traditional batten door on each porch side wall provided access to each room. Both doors are now covered over.

Two solid wooden columns placed in line with and between the exterior rear walls of the two small rooms support the center section of the porch roof. This interesting combination of the rear porch and the adjacent breezeway created a unique T-shaped open space between the main house and the kitchen. The underside of the porch rafter overhang that projects into the breezeway is clad with thin, beaded tongue-and-groove boards.
At some point in the late 19th – early 20th century, a 28-foot-long wing was added to the rear of the Link House. This gable-roofed extension was placed off center to the north and consists of a frame 18 by 18 foot kitchen room separated from the porch by the ten-foot-wide breezeway mentioned above.

This kitchen, sided on the exterior walls with vertical boards and battens, either may have been moved to its location in one piece or was constructed on site. The original entry door of the kitchen has been replaced with a modern six-panel door and fireplace is missing, although an unadorned Greek Revival-style mantel remains in place.

To the north of the fireplace on the rear wall is located an original four-panel back door, but now the opening is covered over on the exterior with vinyl siding. A brick flue, supported by the ceiling joists, passes through the roof near the southeast corner of the kitchen. Located in the southwest corner is a four by six foot pantry (or closet), accessed by a historic four-panel door.
The ceiling of the kitchen consists of thin beaded tongue-and-groove boards. All of the interior walls are covered with horizontal tongue-and-groove boards and a simple chair rail encircles the room four feet above the floor. The kitchen's 1 by 4-inch oak flooring boards are in poor condition. The two sides of the breezeway have been filled in with modern materials, including an oversized double-hung vinyl window on one side and a steel-clad foam door on the other. The breezeway ceiling is covered with thin beaded tongue-and-groove boards.
Inside the main house, the south wall of the entry hall has been moved approximately two feet to the south, enlarging that room at the expense of the south parlor. The interior walls consist of horizontal tongue-and-groove yellow poplar boards covered with wallpaper. There are three surviving six-panel interior doors with hardware and most of the historic door and window trim is intact. The two original mantel pieces are missing.

The well house, which contains modern pumping equipment, consists of a pole frame structure that measures approximately 10' by 12'. It has a gable-front raftered roof facing south clad with 5V-patterned sheet metal panels. Heavy tarpaper siding was installed over vertical boards on all four walls including the gables. The front of the structure has an extended covered open porch that protects the original hand-dug well. The rectangular well structure itself is composed of hewn limestone blocks laid approximately four feet high.
The smokehouse consists of the ruins of a single log pen that measures approximately 14' by 16'. There is a centered door on the west wall and the hewn chestnut and oak timbers are half-dovetail notched at the corners. Some of the lower logs are deteriorated. The logs are the only historic components of the original building that remain.

The two small outbuildings, the chicken coop and privy, are pole frame structures sided with vertical boards and battens and covered with corrugated sheet metal panels. Both are rapidly deteriorating.
Conclusion: The historic Link House, closely tied to the discovery of the world-famous Duck River Cache, is in good condition at the present time, although vandalized. It is a good candidate for rehabilitation and could be used as a ranger or caretaker's residence. Depending on the State's development plans for the site, the house could be restored and serve as a Visitor's Center and/or museum. The Link House is one of the few remaining mid-19th century dwellings that remain in the area and should be preserved.

Sources:


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LINK HOUSE
FORK RIVER RD
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Scale: 1 inch = 10 feet

[Diagram of a building layout with dimensions and annotations]

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